

SOHO SOCIETY PLANNING POLICIES

POLICIES ADDED ON HOTELS, AIR QUALITY, ELECTRIC CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE, FREIGHT CONSOLIDATION for presentation to 2018 AGM

OUR OBJECTIVES

- To make Soho a better place for people to live, work and visit by preserving and enhancing the area's historic fabric, its existing character and its diversity of uses; and by improving its facilities, amenities and the sustainability of its environment.
- To protect the amenity and interests of local residents and the interests of smaller businesses, traders and workers, where necessary, giving priority to local community needs over those of the tourist industry.
- To protect and enhance Soho as a home to a wide range of creative businesses.

WE WORK TO ACHIEVE THIS BY:

- Commenting on all the planning applications and listed building applications sent to us to consider.
- Seeking to protect and enhance the Soho Conservation Area.
- Holding regular meetings with Council officers on policy matters.
- Receiving presentations from developers preferably when their plans are at an early stage.
- Liaising with the Society's licensing committee to seek to ensure that planning decisions and licensing decisions do not conflict.
- Welcoming, suggesting and supporting proposals which reduce overall noise levels, such as noise from air handling plant and nighttime waste collections.
- Welcoming, suggesting and supporting measures which reduce carbon emissions and make the area more sustainable.
- Pressing Westminster City Council to take firm measures, including compulsory purchase, where buildings or sites are used for anti-social purposes or where they remain vacant for many years.
- Welcoming comments on planning issues from members of the Society.
- Campaigning on specific issues with the support of our members.

OUR DETAILED AIMS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES

- To oppose change of use from residential and normally to support the provision of new residential space where it does not involve significant loss of office and commercial space used by small and/or creative businesses.
- To encourage the construction, restoration, rehabilitation and maintenance of social, intermediate and affordable rent residential accommodation with a mix of household sizes.
- We do not support new hotel uses where these involve the loss of permanent homes or of office, cultural and leisure uses or erode the mixed-use character of the area.

LIGHT INDUSTRIAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

- To support the construction, rehabilitation or changes of use which increase the provision of work space which is made available to the creative industries and more specifically the craft, media, post production and creative industries and new start up small businesses.
- To oppose the loss of light industrial space and work space for small and medium sized businesses.

OFFICES

We will normally oppose the loss of small offices to other uses where there is likely to be an adverse impact on employment. We will oppose the conversion of existing office space into large floorplate new offices unless many desirable planning gains are included (see list below of acceptable planning gains) as part of the proposals and to encourage the inclusion of small scale office units in all permitted office developments.

We will oppose development proposals for hotel developments which result in the loss of office space and other commercial uses.

Where permission is sought for ground floor and basement premises that are underneath residential space, and where restaurant use would have an adverse effect on residential amenity, the Society may support as an alternative A1 (retail), A2 (Financial and Professional Services), B1 (Office), or residential use, provided that, where appropriate, provision is made for display or other treatment to improve any retained shop windows.

SHOPPING AND CATERING

- To support existing small and specialist traders and restaurants and encourage the inclusion in developments of small retail units.
- To oppose applications for fully open-able shop-fronts in shops restaurants and bars because of their potential to cause noise nuisance unless there are very clear and lasting conditions to control such nuisance.
- To support the retention of genuine A1 retail and to oppose an increase in further A1/A3 coffee shops and sandwich bars or *sui generis* uses such as betting shops or tanning salons.
- To support the City Council's Cumulative Impact Area policies in relation to licensed premises.
- To oppose changes of use to Class A4, A5, *nightclub* or D2 use unless there are very exceptional circumstances.
- To seek to ensure that all new A4, A5, *nightclub* and D2 uses are restricted to the 'core hours' which are those hours when the premises may be open to the public as set out in WCC's Statement of Licensing Policy, in summary: Monday to Thursday - 11.30pm, Friday and Saturday - midnight and Sundays - 10.30pm.
- To oppose changes of use to A3 and where infrequent exceptions are made on the merits of the case, normally, to ask that hours are restricted to Westminster City Council's 'core hours'.
- Where appropriate to press for conditions relating to these uses to be in binding legal agreements attaching to the permission.
- To seek to ensure that all such premises have on-site rubbish compacting or recycling facilities in order to improve the street environment and to press for the provision of internal onsite bottle crushers to limit the noise impact of glass collections by lorry.
- To support the use of pavements for tables and chairs and for outside drinking, provided sufficient free space for pedestrians is retained (normally at least 2 metres); there is no loss of residential amenity through potential noise nuisance; any pavement use does not take up too great a proportion of newly created public realm; and tables and chairs are removed by 11pm.
- To support full cost recovery charges for the commercial use of the public footpath or highway where it is used for outside drinking or for tables and chairs.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

To support existing and new facilities such as local shops, schools, leisure centres, clinics, launderettes, health centres, doctor's and dentist's surgeries and to encourage Westminster City Council to treat Soho as a residential area in this respect.

TRANSPORT AND PARKING

- To support initiatives aimed at improving and extending public transport services and over time a reduction in private car use.
- To support appropriate pedestrian priority schemes, improved pavements, traffic calming measures and the provision of timed pedestrian phases on traffic lights.
- To oppose provision of additional commuter car parking space or any additional non-residential on-street parking other than for delivery purposes.
- To press for rigorous monitoring and control of resident's parking by WCC to prevent fraud and abuse of the system.
- To support proposals for freight consolidation schemes and measures which discourage or replace noisy late-night collections and deliveries.
- To oppose the loss of the Poland Street and Brewer Street garages because these are useful spaces in which to house micro consolidation centres and other measures which may help to reduce traffic congestion.
- To oppose street widening schemes or the use of Soho by through traffic.
- To press for improved cycling facilities such as properly signed bicycle lanes, cycle racks, cycle hire docking points, secure cycle storage, cycle phases on traffic lights etc. to be included in traffic management schemes.
- To support greater provision of spaces for commercial loading/unloading and motor cycle and scooter parking.
- To support the provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

ENVIRONMENT

- To support the retention of existing buildings where demolition will impose an unacceptable burden on the local area or will not bring about sufficient environmental benefit.
- To support measures which improve air quality and reduce the carbon footprint of the area in order to help to mitigate and adapt to a changing climate. We will particularly support new combined heat/cooling and power plants where they use energy more efficiently both on individual sites and where they can link a number of properties together as effective ways to help Soho towards meeting the 2050 target of an 80% reduction in carbon use.
- To support noise-insulation, pollution control and recycling measures, with particular regard to extract and ventilation plant.
- To oppose the use of environmentally harmful products such as external space heaters and hot air curtains in place of doors on retail shops or other actions which waste resources such as leaving lights on unnecessarily.
- To monitor the impact of the Cross-Rail projects on Soho.
- To discourage the establishment of any noisy activities in Soho and to urge the City Council to reduce the ambient noise level.
- To discourage light pollution of the night sky.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

- To support the retention, repair and maintenance of existing listed buildings, and to support the listing of worthwhile buildings.
- To press WCC to use Compulsory Purchase Orders if listed buildings remain neglected, vacant or if premises remain in unlicensed sex use.

TOWNSCAPE

- To support the maintenance and improvement of existing squares, public places, alleys and courts etc.
- To resist the systematic raising of street heights (“canyonisation”) and to oppose any redevelopment scheme that is out of scale with the existing character of the area in size or design.
- To resist the siting of any new tall buildings within the Soho Conservation Area.
- To support and promote the planting of trees or other greening measures such as the creation of Quiet Zones where appropriate.

FACADES

- To support the retention of authentic facades on each floor of a building to help keep a building’s integrity and authenticity.
- The Soho Conservation Area is typified by individual buildings on relatively small building plots and small floor plates. We support refurbishments and designs which support this character by emphasising the individuality of buildings and shop fronts rather than horizontal homogeneity.
- To encourage the reduction of noise emissions and wasted heat by supporting all doors normally falling closed and, normally, by opposing the use of fully openable shop fronts.

Each application is looked at on its merits and where there are truly exceptional circumstances we may be prepared to accept a scheme that does not completely fit these policies.

PLANNING GAINS

(Not in order of precedence)

When deciding whether to support or oppose a planning application the Society will count the provision of any of the following as a community benefit to be balanced against the disruptions and losses consequent upon any planning permission being implemented.

Applications which provide the following will stand the best chance of our support - if none of these criteria are met then alternative gains will be sought:

- Permanent low rent or otherwise affordable residential accommodation with separate access; completed before commercial premises are occupied; inclusion of ground floor storage for prams, disability equipment, bicycles etc.; balconies; roof gardens. Where off site affordable housing is provided it should be within the West End ward or within the vicinity of it. Where the only solution is that payments are made in lieu of housing to the Affordable Housing Fund these should be recorded as having been generated in the West End Ward and then used in the ward or the vicinity to provide or contribute to affordable housing schemes.
- On-site waste disposal, storage and/or recycling facilities (including glass crushers) for the users of the particular site and the immediate neighbourhood linked to the general waste collection service. See also policy on shopping and catering above.
- Rainwater capture, reducing rainwater run off, CHP and CCHP micro-generation plants and other measures which mitigate and adapt to changes in climate.
- Traffic calming measures, pedestrian refuges; pavement widening and other measures to enhance pedestrian comfort and safety.
- New loading and unloading bays to ease the problems of servicing and deliveries.
- Bicycle racks, lanes and other facilities for cyclists.
- Special features - fountains, trees, green-walls or roofs, increased biodiversity, seats, works of art, open spaces, signage etc.
- Affordable market barrow storage in the Berwick St and Rupert St areas and/or Section 106 protected light industrial accommodation.
- Permanent, free public lavatories.
- Public, social and environment facilities, particularly at ground floor level.
- The provision at concessionary rents of ground floor space for community use, such as meeting rooms, social clubs, creche etc. in all new non-residential developments exceeding 2000m sq. lettable area, or a financial contribution from the developer in lieu.
- The provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- Other planning gains will be considered on merit.

This Planning Mandate is prepared by the Soho Society's Planning and Environment committee, circulated to the membership and was first approved at an Annual General Meeting in 1991. It has been revised in 1996, 1999, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018 the revisions in each case being endorsed by the Society's membership at its Annual General Meeting.